

PROSPECT; or, *View of the Moral World.*

SATURDAY, November 10, 1804.

No. 49.

Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 34.

IN this chapter it appears, that Moses and his god, who had so often fallen out about trifles, become once more reconciled, and unite for re-supplying the tables which Moses had broken in his anger ; but this it seems must be done in secret. The people are to be kept in ignorance, and all the marvelous operations and conjurations of the Jewish god and Moses, are to be vigilantly concealed from popular inspection. In verse 3, it is thus written, “ And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount.” It is very evident from the manner in which Moses conducted himself that he was deceiving the people ; that he did not see God, and that he never had any conversation with him. If he really held an intimate conversation with Jehovah, why did not he and his god come out boldly and bear testimony before an apostate world to the truth of their operations ! But no, they must always be by themselves upon the mountain ; this looks more like juggling and conjuring than like fair dealing. Imposture makes high pretensions and conceals much ; but integrity is open bold and candid. As we proceed in this chapter we find other matters of a censurable nature, contradictory in themselves and inconsistent with the divine perfections. In the 6th verse, it is said, “ The Lord God, merciful and gracious long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth ;” and in the 7th verse, these mild attributes are placed in competition with the high charge of injustice brought against Jehovah. It is there said, “ visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” This abominable doctrine, on which we had occasion to make remarks when passing over the celebrated Decalogue, is here renewed with unblushing impudence, as if the cha.

rafter of God might be traduced with impunity, and his conduct funk below human imbecility and resentment. In the 4th verse of this chapter the Jewish Jehovah obtains a new name made out of a quality which had formerly been ascribed to him, but now entered upon the vocabulary of his names. "For the Lord, whose name is jealous, is a jealous god."

The bible-makers have destroyed all rational confidence in the book by burdening the character of their god with a mass of detestable attributes which would disgrace even the human species. 'The Lord is a jealous God! And of whom or what was he jealous? Had he any rival? Was he alarmed for his success, or was he anxious for the ultimate destiny that awaited him? This was impossible with the God of nature, and therefore the Jewish god must have been a phantom, fabricated by ignorance and superstition.

FOR THE PROSPECT.

In or about the year of our Lord 1710, a Swedish Missionary preached a sermon at an Indian treaty, in which sermon he set forth original sin, the necessity of a mediator, and endeavoured by certain arguments, to induce the Indians to embrace the Christian religion; after he had ended his discourse, one of the Indian Chiefs made a speech in reply to the sermon, the discourse, on both sides, was made known by interpreters. The Missionary on his return to Sweden, published his sermon and the Indian's answer, having written them in Latin, he dedicated them to the University at Upsal, and desired them to furnish him with arguments, to confute such strong reasoning of the Indian. The Indians speech translated from the Latin, is as follows.

Since the subject of his errand is to persuade us to embrace a new doctrine, perhaps it may not be amiss

before we assign him the reasons why we cannot comply with his request, to acquaint him what the grounds and principles of that religion which he would have us abandon are.

Our forefathers were under a strong persuasion (as we are) that those that act well in this life, will be rewarded in the next, according to the degree of their virtue. And on the other hand, those who behave wickedly here will undergo such punishments hereafter, as are proportioned to the crimes they are guilty of. This has been constantly and invariably received and acknowledged for a truth through every succeeding generation of our ancestors. It could not then have taken its rise from fables. Human fiction, however, artfully and plausibly contrived, can never gain credit long amongst the people, where free enquiry is allowed, which was never denied by our ancestors, who on the contrary, thought it the sacred, inviolable, natural right of every man, to examine and judge for himself, therefore, we think it evident that our notion concerning future rewards and punishments was either revealed immediately from heaven to some of our forefathers, and from them descended to us ; or that it was implanted in each of us at our creation, by the creator of all things. Whatever the method might have been, whereby God has been pleased to make known his will, and give us a knowledge of our duty ; it is still, in our sense, a divine revelation. Now we desire to propose to him some questions. Does he believe that our forefathers, men eminent for their piety, constant and warm in the pursuit of virtue, hoping thereby to merit eternal happiness, were all damned ? Does he think, that we, who are their zealous imitators in good works, and influenced by the same motives, earnestly endeavouring with the greatest circumspection, to tread the paths of integrity, are in a state of damnation ? If these be his sentiments they are surely as impious as they are bold and daring. In the next place, we beg that he would explain himself more particularly, concerning the revelation he talks of, if he admits of no other than what is contained

in his written book, the contrary is evident from what has been shewn before. But if he says, that God has revealed himself to us, but not sufficient for our salvation. Then we ask, to what purpose should he have revealed himself to us in any wise? It is clear, that a revelation insufficient to save, cannot put us in a better condition, than we should be in without any revelation at all. We cannot conceive that God would point out to us the end we ought to aim at, without opening to us the way to arrive at that end.

But supposing our understandings to be so far illuminated as to know it to be our duty to please God; who yet has left us under an incapacity of doing it. Will this Missionary, therefore, conclude, that we shall be eternally damned? Will he take upon himself to pronounce damnation against us for those things which he himself acknowledges were impossible by us to be done? It is our opinion, that every man is possessed with sufficient knowledge for his own salvation. The Almighty, for what we know, may have communicated himself to different races of people, in a different manner. Some say they have the will of God in writing; be it so.—Their revelation has no advantage above ours, since both must be equally sufficient to save, or the end of a revelation would be frustrated. Besides, if they be both true, they must be the same in substance, and the difference can only be in the mode of the communication.—He tells us, there are many precepts in his written revelation, which we are entirely ignorant of; but those written commands could only be designed for those who have the writings, they cannot possibly regard us.

Had the Almighty thought so much knowledge necessary for our salvation, his goodness would not have so long deferred the communication of it to us, and to say that in a matter so necessary he could not at one and the same time reveal himself to all mankind, is nothing less than an absolute denial of his omnipotence. Without doubt he can make his will manifest, with, or without the

help of any book, or the assistance of any brutish man whatever.

We shall, in the next place, consider the arguments which arise from a consideration of Providence. If we be the work of God, which we presume will not be denied, it follows thence, that we are under the care and protection of God, for it cannot be supposed that the Deity would abandon his own creatures, and be utterly regardless of their welfare. Then to say the Almighty has permitted us to remain in a fatal error through so many ages is to represent him as a tyrant.

How is it consistent with his justice to force life upon a race of mortals without their consent, and then to damn them eternally, without opening to them a door of salvation: Our conceptions of the gracious God are more noble; and we think that those that teach otherwise, do little less than blaspheme. Again, it is through the care and goodness of the Almighty, that from the beginning of time, through many generations to this day, our names have been unblotted out by our enemies, unreduced to nothing, by the same care we now enjoy our lives, are furnished with the necessary means of preserving those lives; but all those things are trifling compared with our salvation. Therefore, since God has been so careful of us in matters of little consequence, it would be absurd to think that he has neglected us in cases of the greatest importance: admit that he has forsaken us, yet it could not have been without a just cause.

Let us suppose that a heinous crime was committed by one of our ancestors, like to that which happened among another sort of people, in such a case God would certainly have punished the criminal, but would never involve us, who are innocent, in his guilt; those who think otherwise, must make the Almighty a very whimsical, ill natured being.

Once more;—are the Christians more virtuous, or rather, are they not more vicious than we are? If so, how comes it to pass that they are objects of God's beneficence, while we are neglected? Does the Deity con-

fer his favours without reason, and with so much partiality? In a word, we find the Christians much more depraved in their morals than ourselves; and we judge of their doctrine by the badness of their lives.

Profession of Faith from Rousseau, continued.

But do you think that in places where they might write and speak securely, we should have so much the advantage of them? Among the doctors of the Sorbonne, it is as clear as day-light, that the predictions concerning the Messiah relate to Jesus Christ. Among the Rabbins at Amsterdam, it is just as evident they have no relation to him. I shall never believe that I have acquired a sufficient acquaintance with the arguments of the Jew, till they compose a free and independent state, and have their schools and universities, where they may talk and discourse with freedom and impunity. Till then, we can never truly know what they have to say.

At Constantinople, the Turks make known their reasons, and we durst not publish ours: there it is our turn to submit. If the Turks require of us to pay to Mahomet, in whom we do not believe, the same respect which we require the Jews to pay Jesus Christ, in whom they believe as little; can the Turks be in the wrong, and we in the right? On what principles of equity can we resolve that question, in our own favour?

Two thirds of mankind are neither Jew, Mahometans nor Christians; how many millions of men, therefore, who never heard of Moses, of Jesus Christ, or of Mahomet! Will this be denied? Will it be said that our missionaries are dispersed over the face of the whole earth? This indeed is easily affirmed; but are there any of them in the interior of Africa, where no European had ever yet penetrated? Do they travel through the inland parts of Tartary, or follow on horseback the wandering Hords, whom no stranger ever approaches, and

who, so far from having heard of the Pope, hardly know any thing of their own Grand Lama? Do our missionaries traverse the immense continent of America, where there are whole nations still ignorant that the people of another world have set foot on theirs? Are there any of them in Japan, from whence their ill-behaviour hath banished them for ever, and where the fame of their predecessors is transmitted to succeeding generations, as that of artful knaves, who, under cover of a religious zeal, wanted to make themselves imperceptibly masters of the empire? Do they penetrate into the harams of the Asiatic princes, to preach the gospel to millions of wretched slaves? What will become of the women, in that part of the world, for want of a missionary to preach the gospel to them? Must every one of them go to hell for being a recluse?

But were it true that the gospel is preached in every part of the earth, the difficulty is not removed. On the eve preceding the arrival of the first missionary in any country, some one person of that country expired without hearing the glad tidings. Now what must we do with this one person? Is there but a single individual in the whole universe, to whom the gospel of Christ is not made known, the objection which presents itself, on account of this one person, is as cogent as if it included a fourth part of the human race.

Again, supposing the ministers of the gospel actually present and preaching in those distant nations, how can they reasonably expect to be believed on their own word, and that their hearers will not scrupulously require a confirmation of what they teach? Might not any one of the latter very reasonably say to them, "You tell me of a God who was born and put to death near two thousand years ago, at the other end of the world, and in I know not what obscure town; assuring me that all those who do not believe in this mysterious tale are damned. These are things too strange to be credited on the sole authority of a man, who is himself a perfect stranger.

Why hath your God brought those events to pass, of which he requires me to be instructed, at so great a distance? Is it a crime to be ignorant of what passes at the Antipodes? Is it possible for me to divine that there existed, in the other hemisphere, the people of the Jews, and the city of Jerusalem? I might as well be required to know what happened in the moon. You are come, you say, to inform me; but why did you not come time enough to inform my father? Or why do you damn that good old man, because he knew nothing of the matter? Must he be eternally punished for your delay? he who was so just, so benevolent, and so desirous of knowing the truth! Be honest, and suppose yourself in my place. Do you think, upon your testimony alone, that I can believe all these incredible things you tell me? or reconcile so much injustice with the character of that just God, whom you pretend to make known? Let me first, I pray you, go and see this distant country, where so many miracles have happened, totally unknown here. Let me go and be well informed why the inhabitants of that Jerusalem presumed to treat God like a thief or a murderer?

They did not, you will say, acknowledge his divinity. How then can I, who never have heard of him, but from you? You add, that they were punished, dispersed, and led into captivity; not one of them ever approaching their former city. Assuredly they deserved all this: but its present inhabitants, what say they of the unbelief and deicide of their predecessors? They deny it, and acknowledge the divinity of the sacred personage just as little as did its ancient inhabitants.

To be continued.

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